

The IPC Classification System & Taekwondo

The International Paralympic Committee Classification System is a complex process in which the main objective is to classify any Para athlete so he/she can compete with others in the same class on fair and equal grounds.

As the Paralympic Movement evolved various 'disability' groups joined and thus the movement went from a rehabilitation perspective to a sports driven focus. This resulted in a Functional Classification System.

In functional systems, the main factors that determine a class are not diagnosis and medical evaluation, but how much the impairment of a person impacts upon their sports performance.

Starting in 1992 at the Barcelona Paralympic Games, all athletes were classified via the sports-specific functional systems.

Classification Systems

Currently most Paralympic sports use systems of classification that are described as functional, a notable exception being the classification system used by the International Blind Sports Federation (IBSA) for all visually impaired athletes which remains medically based.

In contrast to the medical classification approach in which athletes competed in the same class for all sports, functional systems of classification need to be sports-specific. This is because any given impairment may have a significant impact in one sport and a relatively minor impact in another. In Taekwondo, this is even further defined where some athletes compete in Poomsae, while others in Sparring.

If we are looking at upper limb amputee athletes, there may be different classes for Patterns and Sparring, even though it is the same athlete, but competing in a different type of Para-Taekwondo event.

It is the responsibility of each International Federation to create its own Classification System in accordance with the IPC Classification Code.

The Classification Panel consists of both medical classifiers and technical classifiers. A medical classifier is a physician or physiotherapist. A technical classifier is an individual who has post-secondary degree in a related field (sports science, kinesiology, physical education) and experience in working with people with related disabilities.

In summation the Classification System ensures a fair competitive field for all competitors regardless of their ability.

The Classification Code

The Classification Code sets the norm for classification for all sports in the Paralympic Movement, and establishes a consistent philosophy on classification, specifically as it relates to harmonization and transparency of classification procedures. The Code is intended to be specific enough to achieve harmonization on classification issues where standardization is required, yet general enough in other areas to permit flexibility on how agreed principles are implemented. The Code ensures that a best practice of operations is achieved by all Sports and IFs; thereby protecting the rights of all those involved in the classification process while ensuring accountability and principles of fair play.

All classification rules must use the WHO (World Health Organization) language and use classification-specific terms as defined in the Code. **Classification has two important roles. Firstly, it will be important to determine eligibility to compete.** The criteria detailing how an athlete may be considered eligible to compete shall be defined for each sport by the respective IF, and this on the basis of the specific tasks required for competing in each sport. As a consequence, an athlete might meet the eligibility criteria for one sport, but not be eligible to compete in another sport. **Secondly, eligible athletes will be allocated a class and sport class status in reference to an activity limitation resulting from impairment.**

The goal of the Paralympic Movement is to have sport-specific Classification systems and this was reiterated at the different IPC Governing Board meetings. Providing a conceptual framework for the classification system on the basis of scientific evidence and validated assessment methods will be the key component of classification in the Paralympic Movement. While this perhaps may not be manageable in the short term, the Code reflects this fundamental principle. This will ultimately require sports to review and potentially change things that currently exist and possibly work in their system for the greater good.

As stated above, it is the responsibility of every International Federation to create a Classification system for their athletes. In Taekwondo, since the World Taekwondo Federation (WTF) is the only member of the IOC and IPC, the WTF will take on that responsibility.

The Classification process must take into consideration the following impairment testings:

1. **PHYSICAL** - manual muscle test scores for individual movements (e.g., elbow flexion, elbow extension), assessment of hypertonia at different joints, residual limb length and range of movement for athletes with physical impairment
2. **SENSORY/VISUAL IMPAIRMENT** - assessment of static and dynamic visual acuity, visual field, motion detection, contrast sensitivity, and colour vision in athletes with visual impairment
3. **INTELLECTUAL** - testing of sport intelligence (generic name for component of intellectual functioning or cognition that relate to performance, such as response process, manner and content; executive functioning; and attention/concentration) for athletes with intellectual impairment

Athletes who are deaf/hard of hearing have a different qualification process. Since they are not part of the IPC, the ICSD governs all Deaf sports.

Sport Classes

When an athlete presents for classification for the first time, he/she will have been allocated a 'provisional' sport class. This typically is the outcome of an assessment of the athlete at a national level. This will allow the athlete to be registered for an event and in turn will give the International Federation an initial indication of how many athletes will eventually participate in a particular event.

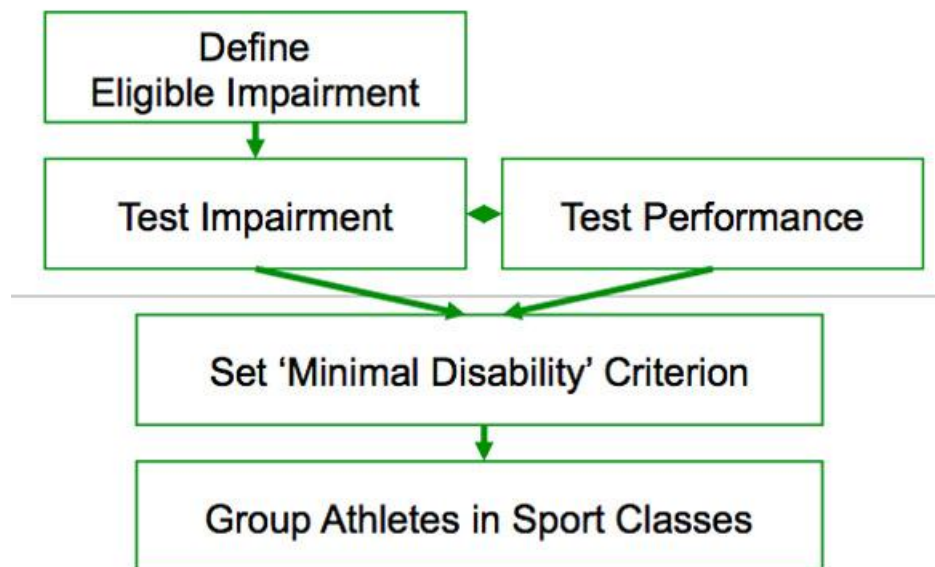
It is important for athletes (and coaches) to understand that this initial sport class is only a 'temporary' assignment.

Once assessed by an international Classification Panel (at a competition identified by the International Federation), the sport class that will be allocated to the athlete AT THAT TIME will take precedent over ANY PREVIOUS sport class allocations.

The process runs like this:

1. After the athlete has been evaluated (via physical and technical assessments), a sport class will be allocated which will allow the athlete to be entered into the correct 'class' for that competition.
2. The athlete is informed of the outcome as soon as possible after the Classification Panel has made the decision.
3. The decision is made public at the end of the classification session.
4. If the classification rules of the sport require 'observation in competition', the athlete is informed, when he/she leaves the assessment room, of when this observation will take place and of the fact that the sport class MAY change after this observation. This procedure is called 'FIRST APPEARANCE' (IPC Classification Code – International Standard for Athlete Evaluation – art. 9)
5. If the classification rules of the sport do not require 'observation in competition', the sport class is final at that stage.

The SPORT CLASS **must** be one of the sport classes as defined in the classification rules. These are typically defined as 'sport class profiles'.



Stages of Classification

Sport Class Status 'N' (NEW) is assigned to an athlete who has not been previously evaluated by an International Classification Panel. For example, this is the case for athletes who were given a 'provisional' class at the national level. Athletes with Sport Class Status N MUST present for classification at the next international competition in which they wish to participate (and where classification is available).

Sport Class Status 'R' (REVIEW) is assigned to an athlete who has been evaluated by an International Classification Panel, BUT for reasons determined by the International Federation, requires another evaluation at a future competition.

'R' status can be assigned to athletes because of:

- the complexity of their impairment in relationship to the demands of the sport or discipline. Examples are athletes with incomplete lesions.
- Fluctuating impairments. Examples are athletes with coordination problems that clinically may manifest themselves differently on different occasions.

The athlete's current sport class is valid until the athlete is seen again by another panel. The International Federation will add the athlete to the classification schedule for the next competition.

It also may be that the Classification Panel is of the view that another assessment should take place, but not necessarily in the near future or at the very next competition. In this case, an athlete can be allocated sport class status 'REVIEW + FIXED DATE'. This will be the case in instances of:

- Progressive impairment. The nature of the impairment is such that it will deteriorate in future, but the process is slow. Muscular dystrophy or multiple sclerosis may be examples of this.
- Unstable medical conditions. An athlete may decide to start competition shortly after injury, but it may be that the final clinical manifestation of impairment is not yet stabilized (e.g. incomplete lesions).
- Maturity. Young athletes may be subject to change in activity limitation until they reach physical/skeletal maturity.

In the case of R+FIXED DATE, the athlete holds the sport class until the expiry date as defined by the Classification Panel, at which time the Athlete will be added to the Classification Schedule for the next competition.

Sport Class Status 'C' (CONFIRMED) is assigned to an athlete if he/she has been previously evaluated by an international Classification Panel and this panel has determined that the athlete's Sport Class will not change.

'C' status athletes are NOT required to present for classification at next competition (unless required to do so by a rule change).